

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01
USIA-06 PRS-01 SP-02 /028 W
-----090850Z 083189 /11
R 040853Z MAR 77
FM AMCONSUL KARACHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1380
INFO AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMCONSUL LAHORE

C O N F I D E N T I A L KARACHI 1044

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PK, PINT
SUBJECT: ELECTION CAMPAIGN

1. SUMMARY: FEARED VIOLENCE DID NOT MATERIALIZE
WHEN BOTH PRIME MINISTER BHUTTO AND PNA OPPOSITION
LEADER ASGHAR KHAN MADE KEY CAMPAIGN VISITS TO KARACHI
MARCH 2. SECURITY PRECAUTIONS WERE THOROUGH AND BOTH
PARTIES REFRAINED FROM PROVOCATIONS. THE BHUTTO PRO-
CESSION WAS COMPARABLE IN SIZE TO THAT OF ASGHAR KHAN
ON FEBRUARY 20 BUT WAS LESS SPONTANEOUS; ITS ORCHESTRA-
TION WAS A TRIBUTE TO THE PPP'S ORGANIZATIONAL ABILITY
AND POWER. ASGHAR KHAN MADE NO ATTEMPT TO COMPETE
DIRECTLY WITH BHUTTO'S SHOW BUT ADDRESSED
TWO LARGE
PUBLIC MEETINGS. CAMPAIGNING WILL END MARCH 5 AND
A TENSE ATMOSPHERE WILL PREVAIL ELECTION DAY, MARCH 7.
EACH PARTY HAS PLANS TO TRY TO INTIMIDATE THE OTHER'S
SUPPORTERS DURING THE VOTING, BUT IT IS REPORTED THAT THE
ARMY (WHICH IS ALREADY IN THE CITY IN CONSIDERABLE
STRENGTH) WILL MAINTAIN ORDER AT THE POLLING
PLACES. EMJ SUMMARY

2. PRIME MINISTER BHUTTO VISITED KARACHI MARCH 2 TO
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CAP THE PPP CAMPAIGN IN THE CITY AND MEET THE CHALLENGE
POSED BY PNA LEADER AIR MARSHAL ASGHAR KHAN'S
ENTHUSIASTIC RECEPTION HERE FEBRUARY 20. BHUTTO'S
25 MILE, 15 HOUR PROCESSION THROUGH THE CITY COMPARED
FAVORABLY IN SIZE TO THAT OF ASGHAR KHAN'S BUT WAS LESS
SPONTANEOUS; THOROUGH PREPARATION BY THE PPP
INCLUDED

THE TRANSPORTATION OF SUPPORTERS FROM POINTS OUTSIDE KARACHI AND POLICE ASSISTANCE IN COMMANDEERING VEHICLES FOR THE PARADE. THE PRIME MINISTER MADE SIX SPEECHES AS HE PROGRESSED FROM POINT TO POINT. HE EMPHASIZED ISSUES ON WHICH THE PNA APPEARS TO BE VULNERABLE: ITS ALLEGED INABILITY TO GOVERN SINCE IT IS A LOOSE COALITION; ITS READINESS TO RELEASE WALI KHAN AND REINSTATE THE NAP, AND ITS SUPPOSED ASSOCIATION WITH THE "CAPITALISTS" WHOSE GRIP ON THE COUNTRY THE PPP CLAIMS TO HAVE LOOSENED.

3. THE VIOLENCE WHICH HAD BEEN WIDELY FEARED DID NOT MATERIALIZE ON MARCH 2. THE PPP WORKERS IN THE PROCESSION HAD BEEN INSTRUCTED TO BE PREPARED TO COUNTER VIOLENCE WITH VIOLENCE, BUT THEY REFRAINED FROM PROVOKING PNA SUPPORTERS ALTHOUGH THE PROCESSION WAS DELIBERATELY ROUTED THROUGH SEVERAL PNA NEIGHBORHOODS. PNA RESTRAINT WAS ALSO IN EVIDENCE, IN COMPLIANCE WITH INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE PARTY LEADERSHIP TO AVOID VIOLENCE WHICH WOULD GIVE THE GOVERNMENT AN EXCUSE TO CRACK DOWN ON THEM OR EVEN POSTPONE THE ELECTION. ASGHAR KHAN RETURNED TO KARACHI THE EVENING OF MARCH 2 AND SPOKE TO A LARGE CROWD, BUT AT A LOCATION FAR REMOVED FROM THE PRIME MINISTER'S PROCESSION ROUTE. THOROUGH SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS, INCLUDING THE STATIONING OF FEDERAL POLICE AND ARMY UNITS AT VARIOUS POINTS IN THE CITY, ALSO CONTRIBUTED TO THE PEACEFUL ATMOSPHERE THAT PREVAILED ON MARCH 2.

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4. VIOLENCE HAD BEEN FEARED ALSO ON MARCH 3, THE PROPHET'S BIRTHDAY, WITH THE PNA EXPECTED TO TRY TO EQUATE THE PARTY WITH DEVOTION TO ISLAM. THE MAJOR PROCESSION OF THE DAY WAS IN FACT LED BY CERTAIN PNA LEADERS, BUT AS LEADERS OF RELIGIOUS PARTIES WITHIN THE PNA THEY HAVE BEEN NATURALLY ASSOCIATED WITH THIS CELEBRATION ANNUALLY. THE PROCESSION PROCEEDED PEACEFULLY; THE DAY WAS GENERALLY FESTIVE THROUGHOUT THE CITY, AND ONLY SCATTERED MINOR INCIDENTS BETWEEN RIVAL PARTY WORKERS OCCURRED. ASGHAR KHAN ADDRESSED A LARGE PUBLIC MEETING IN THE EVENING. BHUTTO RESTED.

5. NEITHER BHUTTO'S PROCESSION OF MARCH 2 NOR ASGHAR KHAN'S PROCESSION OF FEBRUARY 20, BOTH IMPRESSIVE SHOWS, PROVIDES A CLEARCUT INDICATION OF HOW THINGS WILL GO IN KARACHI ON ELECTION DAY, MARCH 7. PRESUMABLY THE PNA WILL CONTINUE TO TRY TO AVOID VIOLENCE

BECAUSE IT WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY LOSE IN A CONFRONTATION OF FORCE WITH THE PPP WHICH COULD INVOKE THE POWERS OF GOVERNMENT. USUALLY RELIABLE SOURCES WITHIN THE PPP INFORM US THAT PLANS ARE BEING MADE TO INTIMIDATE AND CRIPPLE THE PNA BY ARRESTING ITS KEY WORKERS UNDER THE DEFENSE OF PAKISTAN RULES, DISRUPTING PNA ACTIVITIES AND DESTROYING PNA CAMPAIGN OFFICES (A TACTIC PURSUED BY BOTH PARTIES IN KARACHI DURING MOST OF THE CAMPAIGN). PNA LEADERS ARE CLAIMING PUBLICLY THAT NUMEROUS PARTY WORKERS HAVE IN FACT BEEN ARRESTED ALREADY. BOTH PARTIES HAVE PLANNED INTIMIDATORY ACTIVITIES, PASSIVE OR ACTIVE AS CIRCUMSTANCES DICTATE, AT POLLING PLACES ON ELECTION DAY. HOWEVER, USUALLY RELIABLE SOURCES HAVE INFORMED US THAT ARMY DETACHMENTS WILL BE STATIONED AT POLLING PLACES TO ENSURE ORDER. IF TRUE, THIS SHOULD REDUCE THE HOKELIHOOD OF OUTRIGHT BALLOT

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BOX STUFFING OR INTERPARTY CLASHES, BUT PROBABLY THE OFFICIAL ARMY SURVEILLANCE WILL TILT THE BALANCE SOMEWHAT IN FAVOR OF THE PPP.

6. THE PNA ELECTION CAMPAIGN IN KARACHI IS EXPECTED TO PEAK THE EVENING OF MARCH 4 WITH SPEECHES BY SEVERAL PARTY LEADERS AT A MAJOR PUBLIC MEETING. ALL CAMPAIGNING IS SCHEDULED TO END AT MIDNIGHT MARCH 5.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ELECTION CAMPAIGNS, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 04-Mar-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977KARACH01044
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770080-0955
Format: TEL
From: KARACHI
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770393/aaaadeck.tel
Line Count: 148
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: a1c4adbd-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 21-Mar-2005 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3209935
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: ELECTION CAMPAIGN
TAGS: PINT, PK
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/a1c4adbd-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009